

## Abacha, Sani

(1943-1998), a Nigerian Army general, seized the presidency of Nigeria in a military coup in 1993 and ruled the country as head of a military dictatorship until 1998.

Abacha was commissioned as an officer in the Nigerian Army in 1963. In 1966, Abacha was one of a group of northern officers who brought down the military government of General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi and supported the leadership of General Yakubu Gowon. Abacha fought for the Nigerian government in the war against the breakaway region of Biafra (1967-1970). In 1975, he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel. Five years later, he became a brigadier and took command of Nigeria's 9th Mechanized Brigade.

In 1983, in a military take-over led by General Mohammed Buhari, Abacha became commander of the 2nd Mechanized Division and a member of Nigeria's Supreme Military Council. He went on to become a major general in 1984.

In 1985, Abacha helped overthrow Buhari and supported the dictatorship of General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida. Under Babangida, Abacha became chief of staff of the Army and then defense minister and chairman of the joint chiefs of staff. He became a lieutenant general in 1987.

In 1993, the Army allowed elections for a new civilian government. Chief Moshood Abiola won the election for president. However, Babangida's regime refused to accept the election result and, in the riots that followed, Babangida lost power. Abacha dismissed the interim civilian government, led by Chief Ernest Shonekan, and took control of Nigeria in November 1993. Although he promised an early return to civilian government, the promise was never kept. In 1994, Abacha banned political activities and imprisoned his political opponents, including Chief Abiola. He also imprisoned human rights activists and striking workers. In 1995, the Abacha regime executed or imprisoned a large number of military officers said to have been involved in a coup attempt. In November 1995, Abacha provoked international condemnation when he executed the writer Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other politically active members of the Ogoni people. The action resulted in the suspension of Nigeria's membership of the Commonwealth of Nations and the stopping of international aid to the country.

During Abacha's regime, corruption was rampant and Nigeria's economy suffered. Abacha enforced his will through terror campaigns and shootings. In 1996, he reacted to criticism from President Nelson Mandela of South Africa by forbidding the Nigerian national soccer team's defense of their African championship title in Mandela's country. Abacha also ignored pleas from Pope John Paul II for the release of a group of named political prisoners. After Abacha died, reportedly of a heart attack, on June 8, 1998, he was succeeded by another military leader, General Abdulsalami Abubakar.

Sani Abacha was born on Sept. 20, 1943, in Kano, northern Nigeria. He was a member of the Kanuri ethnic group, who live in northeastern Nigeria. He went to school in Kano and



then joined the Nigerian Army. He received his military training at the Nigerian Military Training College in Kaduna and the Mons Defence Officers' Cadet Training College, Aldershot, in England.

**How to cite this article:**

To cite this article, World Book recommends the following format:

"Abacha, Sani." World Book Online Info Finder. World Book, 2014. Web.  
16 May 2014 .

